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INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000762

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER ASEC MOPS SO ET
SUBJECT: Somalia Security Highlights

REF: Nairobi 660

Classified by PolOff John O'Leary. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) Two Somali groups have emerged claiming to lead the resistance to the TFG and its Ethiopian supporters. One of the groups has threatened to attack aircraft attempting to use Mogadishu International Airport, though it may be satisfied for the time being with disrupting TFG revenue flows. The Islamic Courts have called for popular resistance citing Iraq and Afghanistan as models, but its foreign secretary has called for dialogue with the TFG and indicated a willingness to accept foreign peacekeeping troops. Meanwhile, numerous attacks continue in Mogadishu with scores dead and wounded; and hundreds of residents are fleeing the city. A "neighborhood watch" program exists in some Mogadishu neighborhoods, which may be reducing security problems in those locales. Despite the problems in the capital, most of the rest of Somalia is calm. End summary.

The Resistance?

¶12. (U) Although no one is acknowledging responsibility for specific acts of anti-TFG and -Ethiopian violence in and around Mogadishu, two groups are now claiming to be involved in resistance to the government and its supporters:

--The Resistance Movement in the Land of the Two Migrations; and

--The Somali People's Resistance Movement.

¶13. (U) The first group, the Two Migrations movement, announced itself on the Islamic Courts' favored website "Qaadisiya" on February 12. In an open letter to airlines, airline passengers, and aid organizations, the movement claimed that the Ethiopians were "thriving" from the imposition of excess airport fees at Mogadishu International Airport; and it threatened to shoot down any and all aircraft using the facility. The letter goes on the state that airlines and passengers are free to use any other airport.

¶14. (C) A reliable source informed the Embassy that Prime Minister Gedi's office received \$150 per passenger on flights from Mogadishu International and that the PM's

office made a small fortune during the recent Hajj season. The Somali head of Juba Airlines, which is based out of Mogadishu International, told a reliable Embassy contact that he took the threat seriously and that he would suspend or redirect operations.

¶5. (U) The second group appeared at a rally in Mogadishu led by a masked figure calling himself Abdirasaq. (Subsequent news reporting claimed the masked figure was Aden Hashi Ayrow, a central leader of the Shabaab.) Speaking to the group of approximately 300 demonstrators, mostly women and children, he claimed that the People's Resistance Movement was responsible for the continuous stream of attacks in the Mogadishu area. He stated that the attacks would continue until Ethiopian troops left Somalia, and he warned that AU peacekeepers would face harm if they enter the country.

The Stick and the Carrot?

¶6. (U) A February 10 statement from the Islamic Courts on the Qaadisiya website claimed that the Courts control the Two Migrations movement and called on Somalis to support the movement's offensive "codenamed 'Restoration of Dignity and Tigrean Hemorrhage'". It calls on the population to persevere against the Ethiopians and the "apostate" TFG. It states: "Your example is Iraq where the resistance is visiting problems upon American and British colonialists daily. Look again at the Afghan mujahideen who have butchered invading NATO troops."

¶7. (C) In contrast is a February 12 e-mail from Islamic
NAIROBI 00000762 002 OF 003

Courts' Foreign Secretary Ibrahim Hassan Addou to the Ambassador in which he lists six steps "to save Somalia":

--Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Ethiopian troops;

--Deployment of peacekeeping forces acceptable to the majority of Somali people and political groups;

--Immediate political dialogue among the major political groups such as TFG, SCIC, civil society, and Somali intellectuals;

--Hold the dialogue in a neutral country outside of Somalia;

--Hold the dialogue under the auspices of the U.S., the EU, and the Arab League;

--Allow the Courts as an institution to participate in the talks, not individual members (who will lack legitimacy).

The Neighborhood Watch

¶8. (U) At least some neighborhoods in Mogadishu have formed armed neighborhood watch groups, also called vigilantes and militias. According to observers, these groups are comprised of "youths" who guard individual family compounds but come to each other's aid when trouble brews. Families that are not able to field watchers donate small gifts in cash or kind to help support and encourage these "youths". The groups appear to collaborate with the government, and one observer noted that there seem to be fewer security problems in areas where the watch is active.

General Developments

¶9. (U) Violence continued to plague Mogadishu, where hundreds are reportedly fleeing indiscriminate, daily attacks and counterattacks. Four were killed and two dozen others injured in Kismaayo, including new TFG armed forces chief, General Abdi Mohamed, who was addressing a rally when a grenade or IED exploded. The TFG continued to publicly blame Islamic Courts' remnants for the bloodshed, and Deputy Defense Minister Salad Jele declared "Dialogue time is over...we are left with no option other than to restore peace by subduing anyone who stands in our way." The TFG cabinet approved a new anti-terror law. In a meeting the Ambassador held on February 13 with 18 representatives of humanitarian and development assistance organizations, local and international staff operating in Mogadishu and in south central Somalia reported they are more concerned about safety and security now than they have been in years.

¶10. (U) Yet, a group of Somali Islamic religious leaders urged their religious brethren "to stand up for the security of the residents of Mogadishu..." The new TFG Minister of Health, Qamar Adan Ali, urged the TFG to negotiate with both Islamic Courts moderates and hard-liners. And, despite a few scattered incidents in other towns, the vast majority of Somalia remained calm.

Comment

¶11. (C) The Resistance Movement in the Land of the Two Migrations and the Somali People's Resistance Movement may be one in the same. The advent of both groups over the same weekend seems more than a coincidence. If TFG foreign Minister Hurre is correct and the current mayhem is really attributable to warlords and criminals (reftel), then the Courts, or elements thereof, may be taking advantage of the situation to improve their own bargaining position(s). Certainly, the Courts--or their remnants--want a role in a future Somalia and would probably be willing to piggyback on somebody else's efforts until their own strike element is fully enabled.

¶12. (C) The threat to attack air traffic at Mogadishu International may or may not be viable, but it could have the effect of disrupting operations--or at least reducing use. One Somali observer believed that the Two Movement's

NAIROBI 00000762 003 OF 003

immediate aim was to reduce TFG revenue from airport fees. In any case, given the instability in Mogadishu, airport patrons will be forced to factor the menace into their commercial and travel plans.

¶13. (C) The former Islamic Courts' Foreign Secretary Addou's e-mail, coming only two days after the Courts' call-to-arms, highlights the divisions that characterized the Islamic Courts throughout their short-lived grip on power. Despite TFG President Yusuf's and Prime Minister Gedi's assertions that there are no moderate Islamists with whom to negotiate, it appears there could be. This chink in the Courts' solidarity is open to exploitation.

¶14. (SBU) While some of the NGO representatives mentioned in Para. 9 asserted that the violence in Mogadishu was the worst in recent memory, others--and most observers--attribute the pervading fear to the randomness of the destruction rather than to the extent of the violence. In past years, residents could predict locations which were more susceptible to violence and avoid those areas. Now, however, attackers and defenders lob munitions across neighborhoods; and when they miss their targets, they haphazardly hit the innocent.

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